

## Stream #6

# The Matthew Effect in Social and Educational Policies and the Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantages Over the Life Course

### Conveners:

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The stream seeks to explore the enduring and multifaceted nature of social inequalities, focusing on the "Matthew Effect" and the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. The stream aims to bring together social scientists to delve into the mechanisms by which inequalities are perpetuated and exacerbated over time and across generations.

In social sciences the concept of the Matthew Effect—coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton - refers to the cumulative advantage processes that lead to popular idea that the rich get richer while the poor become poorer. These dynamics resonate across a wide array of social, economic, and political domains, creating cycles of privilege and disadvantage that persist over the life course and across generations. In parallel, intergenerational transmissions of disadvantage highlight how family background, social networks, and institutional barriers perpetuate unequal outcomes in education, income, health, and political participation.

Specifically, in the social policy literature the concept of Matthew Effect is used to describe whether and to what extent social and educational policies in themselves act in practice as mechanisms of creation of Matthew Effects, fostering or weakening the intergenerational transmissions of disadvantage. For instance, in relation to short- and longer-term outcomes of social investment policies the Matthew Effect featured as a central point of criticism.

Understanding these interconnected processes is vital for addressing contemporary challenges such as entrenched poverty, widening economic disparities, and social immobility, and to evaluate the effects of different social and education policies and their institutional designs and implementation. This will also require a stronger theoretical and empirical basis of the Matthew Effect

and how it can be observed and studies across of range of different social, family, health and education policy fields.

We invite papers around these issues, with a particular focus on the following topics of interest:

- formal childcare and education services (ECEC);
- primary, secondary, and tertiary education;
- active labour market policies;
- healthcare policies;
- long-term care policies.

Papers could address some of the following questions. How do cumulative advantages in access to education shape life trajectories? What role do early childhood interventions play in breaking cycles of disadvantage? What are the mechanisms that perpetuate wealth gaps across generations? How do social policies contribute to the reproduction of economic inequalities? How do social determinants of health, such as access to healthcare and living conditions, lead to cumulative disadvantages over the life course? How do different welfare regimes and policy interventions mediate Matthew Effects and intergenerational inequalities in various countries?

We encourage submissions that examine these issues through diverse theoretical, methodological, and empirical lenses. In particular, we welcome contributions employing innovative approaches, including quantitative analyses, longitudinal studies, experimental designs, and qualitative research. Interdisciplinary perspectives and comparative studies are particularly encouraged to foster a comprehensive understanding of these complex phenomena.